

is to remove this amnesty under the present condition and return those who are going to be here working in a legal status? Would the Senator think that is a fair characterization?

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is very clear we worked very hard to make sure there was no amnesty and that there was a path to legalization. The people had to have a job, pay their taxes and stay out of trouble, learn English and pay penalties and fines and then move to the back of the line. What we did legislatively was nothing short of miraculous to get it passed in this body. It would be a disaster for this country not to move forward on this with the tremendous amount of work we have done. As I have said, on a bipartisan basis we did that. Here is a Senate action that was not in a partisan vein but in a bipartisan vein.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2007

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume the consideration of S. 2766, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2766) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2007 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe personnel strengths for such fiscal year for the Armed Forces, and for other purposes.

Pending:

McCain amendment No. 4241, to name the act after John Warner, a Senator from Virginia.

Kennedy amendment No. 4322, to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to provide for an increase in the Federal minimum wage.

Enzi amendment No. 4376, to promote job creation and small business preservation in the adjustment of the Federal minimum wage.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be 1½ hours equally divided for debate between the Senator from Wyoming, Mr. ENZI, and the Senator from Massachusetts, Mr. KENNEDY or their designees.

Who yields time? The Senator from Massachusetts is recognized.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, in a short while, we will have an opportunity in the Senate to vote on whether we are going to provide an increase in the minimum wage that will affect approximately 15 million Americans. We have not, as has been pointed out in our discussions yesterday and the day before, increased the minimum wage in the last 9 years. Even the \$5.15 an hour, the current minimum wage, has lost, since 9 years ago, about 20 percent of its purchasing power.

The men and women who earn the minimum wage are men and women of dignity. They take pride in doing the jobs they do, although they do very menial work at the bottom rung of the economic ladder. They work as teachers assistants in our schools. They

work in the nursing homes looking after the men and women who have made this country the great country it is. They provide the essential services in many of the buildings of our Nation, where American commerce is taking place. They work and they play by the rules and still they fall further and further behind.

I think there is a broad agreement in this body—there should be—that if you are going to work in the United States and you are going to work 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, you should not have to live in poverty. But these individuals do. We have seen what has happened to the minimum wage over recent years. The minimum wage jobs are not jobs that get you out of poverty. Minimum wage jobs are jobs that keep you in poverty. That is a rather dramatic difference from what we have had historically when we had Democratic and Republican administrations all voting for an increase in the minimum wage and an expansion of minimum wage coverage.

So that is the issue that is going to be before us, whether we are going to go over a 2-year period and raise the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour. There are those who are strongly opposed to it. We heard some of those voices yesterday. They say let's let the market decide on these issues. Let's let the market make the judgment and decide whether \$5.15 is fair or whether we should see even a reduction. We have a number of States that have no minimum wage whatsoever, none. It is amazing. Six States have no minimum wage. One State has minimum wage of \$2.65 an hour.

I think Americans have made the judgment that a minimum wage ought to be a minimum wage and people who work ought to be able to at least get the essentials in life. Of course, that is impossible today with the explosion in costs. We have seen the explosion of costs taking place, whether it is gasoline, education funds, health care or whether it is food, but we have not seen an increase in the minimum wage. We have seen an increase in salaries of the Members of the Senate. That has gone through. We have seen that over the last 9 years.

We have increased our salaries with the cost of living by some \$30,000, but we refuse to provide an increase in the minimum wage for primarily women because 59 percent of these individuals who would benefit are women. They work hard. Many of those women have children. So it is a women's issue and a children's issue. It is also a family issue. We hear a great deal in the public discourse about family values, about our value system in the United States. Is X, Y, and Z public policy issue consistent with our values? Certainly, if you are talking about having someone who is going to work 40 hours a week, a woman who works hard and is trying to raise a child, whether they are going to be able to have any family time together effectively or whether

that woman is going to have to work two or three jobs and have little or no time with that child is a family issue and is a values issue.

Americans understand that. So this is a values issue. The leaders of our great religions understand it.

That is why the members of the churches in our country have been in strong support—and I will come back to that in a minute—of an increase in the minimum wage. It is also a civil rights issue because so many of those men and women entering the job market at this level are men and women of color. It is a children's issue, a women's issue and, mostly I as I have said many times and continue to say, it is a fairness issue. Americans understand fairness. Work hard and play by the rules in the richest country in the world and you should not have to live in poverty. Yet we find that at the end of the year, these families are \$6,000 below the poverty line and they are falling further behind.

This is it. We're not going to get another chance. Arguments will be made that, well, you should not offer it on this particular legislation. This is the Defense authorization bill. We say: Look, Mr. Republican leader, give us a chance to have a direct up-or-down vote on the increase in the minimum wage. You have your alternative on it. Give us a freestanding bill and I have indicated that we would withdraw this amendment, but we have been unable to get that.

All of us understand legislatively that we are moving more and more rapidly into the appropriations, and there is going to be a point of order made against legislating on appropriations. This legislation is appropriate for a very basic and fundamental reason. That is why our men and women who wear the American uniform are fighting in Iraq and fighting in Afghanistan—to defend American values and ideals. One of the American values is fairness here at home. It is treating people fairly for a day's work. That is an American value. That is one of the values these Americans are fighting for. That is why it is appropriate here. I don't know offhand, though, if we had more time—and I will find out next time we debate this issue because even if we get \$7.25 an hour, we are still failing to meet the needs of working poor. I don't know how many servicemen are in the military serving overseas whose parents are earning the minimum wage, but there are scores of them.

So this is about the values we hold in this country and the values worth protecting by the military of this country. That is what it is talking about. We understand there are important debates going on through noontime, and as far as I am concerned, they can go on through the evening. The idea that we are taking a few moments this morning to talk about an issue that affects some 15 million of our fellow citizens—this Senate could find plenty of time to debate the estate taxes, plenty